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SUBJECT: ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENT AND CARGO SECURITY
DEVELOPMENTS AT OAS PORTS MEETING

REF: PANAMA 644

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Top-level port officials met in Buenos Aires, March 23-27, for the Tenth Executive Board Meeting of the Organization of American States' Inter-American Committee on Ports (CIP). The Maritime Administration led the U.S. delegation, which included USOAS and Coast Guard officials. The annual board meeting dealt with the issues noted below.

ECONOMIC CRISIS PERVADES MEETING DISCUSSIONS

¶2. (U) With over 90 percent of world trade transported via international shipping, the impact of the economic crisis and the associated decrease in commerce drew major attention in the presentations and discussions. Recommendations for overcoming challenges included increasing competitiveness of the port sector by simplifying and streamlining port administrative affairs, improving connections between ports and other transportation infrastructure such as trucks and railways, differentiating among client bases, and simplifying contracts and rates.

DRAFT DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL PORT PROTECTION MOVES FORWARD DESPITE VENEZUELAN EFFORTS

¶3. (U) On the margins of the plenary meetings, the U.S. worked with other delegations to conclude the draft Declaration on Environmental Port Protection, which Venezuela had held up since April 2007 (REFTEL PANAMA 644). The Panamanian Chair sought to appease Venezuela by adopting their language. The U.S. succeeded in convincing all delegations to return to the original language negotiated by environmental policy port experts, allowing for consensus on the final document.

COMMITTEE IDENTIFIES FUTURE AREAS FOR COOPERATION

¶4. (U) Twenty-three resolutions passed during the week-long meeting. Several called for strengthening of cooperation and exchange with Spain, already actively involved with CIP. Another resolution calls for the first hemispheric conference on port logistics and competitiveness to occur with the support of the Port of Le Havre/Soget S.A. of France.

¶5. (U) The latest draft Memorandum of Understanding between the International Maritime Organization and the General Secretariat of the OAS calls for coordination particularly in the areas of maritime safety, port security, and the environment. It also proposes collaboration with other international organizations, such as the Inter-American Development Bank.

¶6. (U) At the invitation of the Subcommittee on Port Security, the Pan American Health Organization made a

presentation on the new International Health Regulations of 2005, which call for strengthened capacity in surveillance and control of public health emergencies, including ports. The presentation opened up a new area for potential collaboration with PAHO and CIP. There appears considerable interest in this topic among Caribbean countries, whose economies remain highly dependent on the cruise vessel tourist trade.

CARIBBEAN NATIONS EXPRESS CONCERNS OVER PORT TRAINING AND COMPLIANCE WITH U.S. MARITIME CARGO SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

¶7. (U) Caribbean nations reiterated the long-standing issue of CIP training, frequently conducted in Spanish and influenced by OAS Permanent Observer Spain, and discourages participation by English-speaking port authorities.

¶8. (U) In response to the U.S. presentation on the 2007 Safe Port Act, which requires 100 percent scanning of all U.S.-bound maritime cargo by 2012, small-island nations expressed great concern over the enormous costs required for compliance. Mexico also put forth a resolution calling for the U.S. to provide a technical presentation on the U.S. regulatory framework on cargo and passengers.

ALLIANCE CALLS FOR IMPROVED CIP ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNICATION

¶9. (U) The U.S., Brazil, Chile, and Canada submitted a resolution for the Subcommittee on Policy and Coordination to make recommendations to improve the operational aspects of the Subcommittees and Technical Advisory Groups and to present on this topic at the next CIP Meeting.

10.(U) The U.S., Brazil, Chile, and Canada submitted a "Report on the Focus and Organizational Aspects of Subcommittee and Technical Advisory Group (TAGS) Meetings" for the consideration of member states. The report calls for improved coordination with other multilateral organizations and the elimination of redundancy between Subcommittees and Technical Advisory Groups. In addition, the report calls for improved dissemination of information, communication, and changes to the current meeting structures.

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